



DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VEHICLE THEFT DECLINES 34 PERCENT IN FIVE YEARS

COMPTON--Californians are much less likely to have their cars stolen than five years ago, a result of coordinated investigation, new technology and public awareness.

California Highway Patrol (CHP) Commissioner D.O. Helmick announced today auto thefts declined nine percent in the state during the first half of 1998 and plunged 34.5 percent over the five years from 1993-1997.

Helmick announced the reduction in auto thefts during a press conference in the city of Compton to commemorate Vehicle Theft Prevention Week (August 2-8). Helmick displayed several vehicles recovered following the arrest of an international theft ring exporting stolen cars to Hong Kong in shipping containers.

“Vehicle thieves become more devious every year. To fight back, we’re forming interagency task forces, using new technology and asking the public to alert us to ‘chop shop’ operations,” Helmick said.

In 1992, thieves stole 315,000 vehicles. By 1997, thefts had dropped to 219,000. Vehicle thefts are expected to drop to just over 200,000 by the end of the year.

The CHP’s Foreign Export and Recovery (FEAR) Team, in cooperation with U.S. Customs and the Riverside Police Department, recently broke up a theft ring and recovered 25 cars, including 11 in shipping containers, and arrested five suspects.

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Using fiber-optic viewing devices to scan shipping container contents is one of the high tech methods used by the CHP in auto theft investigations.

Citizens also are assisting in catching car thieves, Helmick said. Through 1-800-TELL-CHP, the public is reporting suspected illegal auto dismantlers (chop shops), locations where vehicles arrive and depart at odd hours, and vehicle activity at supposedly vacant warehouses.

Helmick emphasized vehicle owners can prevent theft with simple precautions. "Law enforcement can only do so much. People should lock their cars and use additional security in high crime areas," he said.
